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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000432

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SUBJECT: READOUT ON ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH'S "SUCCESSFUL"

U.S. TRIP

REF: A. ISTANBUL 243

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 405

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. A close advisor who accompanied the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on his October 20 - November 6 trip to the United States provided us with a debriefing of the trip in which the Patriarch attended an environmental symposium, held services in New York and Washington D.C. and met with leading political figures. Meetings with President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Clinton touched on the importance of reopening Halki Seminary, succession, environmental concerns, and the inherent political interest involved in the rebuilding of a relationship between the Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. POTUS committed to broaching the issues of patriarchal succession and Halki with Prime Minister Erdogan during a bilateral meeting on December 7. The Patriarch was enthusiastically greeted by thousands at several large gatherings during his trip, and his U.S. - based spokesperson explained that the Patriarchate and American Greek Orthodox Archdiocese also tweeted and Facebooked on the Patriarch's activities throughout his trip, receiving over 37,000 hits from followers. The Patriarch expressed his gratitude in person to the Consul General for his positive experiences in the United States. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In speaking to the Consul General, the Patriarch dubbed a success his October 20-November 6 visit to the United States to attend an environmental symposium in New Orleans, conduct services for American Greek Orthodox and others, and hold official meetings in Atlanta, New York, and Washington DC. This was his second substantial visit to the U.S. during his 18 year tenure as Ecumenical Patriarch. (His last substantial visit to the United States was in 1997.) American Diocese spokesperson for the Patriarch during his travels, Father Mark Ayer, said the Patriarch went to the U.S. with two objectives: promoting environmental awareness and representing the interests of his flock by furthering relationships with heads of state. (Note: The Patriarch was christened the "Green Patriarch" by Al Gore while in the United States in 1997.) Ayer said that the Patriarch was very impressed with the level of awareness on Greek Orthodox issues that he observed in his meetings with President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and especially Vice President Biden. The Patriarch expressed his gratitude personally to the Consul General on November 8 "for all that he experienced during his long sojourn to the U.S." where two million followers of Orthodoxy reside.

Outreach

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¶3. (SBU) While the Patriarch as a rule does not grant interviews, Ayer explained that as a favor to ethnic Turkish and Coca Cola CEO Muhtar Kent in Atlanta, the Patriarch conducted an hour long interview aired on the Charlie Rose Show. The Patriarchate and American Archdiocese also reached out with social media and tweeted and Facebooked on the Patriarch's activities throughout his trip, receiving over 37,000 hits from followers. However, Ayer also noted that it was difficult to sell the Patriarch's visit to news outlets given the small number of Greek Orthodox in the United States.

Meetings in the U.S.  
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¶4. (C) In addition to meeting with the Greek and Turkish ambassadors to the United States, and the President, Vice President and Secretary, the Patriarch met with UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon, Brookings Institute president Strobe Talbot, and former President Clinton. He also met with Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Reid. Substantive meetings with the President, Vice President, and Secretary touched on the importance of reopening Halki Seminary, succession, environmental concerns, and the inherent political interest involved in the rebuilding of a relationship between the Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Church. Ayer noted that Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill (Ref A) is only slightly lower in political power and importance than Putin, but far more important than Medvedev, making the Russian Church a crucial element in the

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Russian political objective of solidifying control in the Former Soviet Union, "just as Constantine utilized Christianity."

¶5. (C) The Patriarch invited Fetullah Gulen to join an interfaith lunch in New York, including representatives from the Abrahamic religions (Ref B). Gulen did not attend, but twenty children attending Gulen-sponsored schools arrived at the event bearing flowers. However, Ayer cryptically noted that although he attended all official meetings with the Patriarch, the Patriarch might have met with Gulen independently.

Comment and Recommendation  
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¶6. (C) Following their meeting on November 3, Ayer confirmed that POTUS committed to broaching the issues of patriarchal succession and Halki with Prime Minister Erdogan during a bilateral meeting on December 7. Septels will address the Turkish concerns with the reopening of Halki, the role of Halki in the Patriarchate, as well as the question of patriarchal succession.

¶7. (C) The Patriarch's successful substantive meetings throughout his trip further emphasized his well-respected role as a conscientious religious leader dedicated to unifying humanity around common areas of concern. In moving forward on the issue of Halki seminary, however, the Patriarch may need to pursue additional dialogue with the GOT. It is our understanding that the Patriarch has not met with senior representatives of the GOT in the last six years to discuss viable solutions in any detail for the reopening of Halki. The President's discussion with PM Erdogan would be more productive if, prior to the discussion, the Patriarch were to engage with the GOT to address the details for what they seek on Halki. This differs from the Patriarch's current strategy of waiting for the GOT to come to him with their proposal.

WIENER